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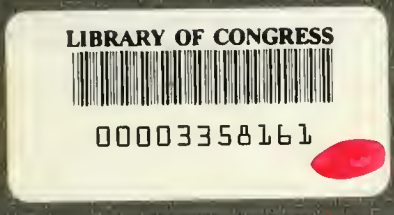

The Washington Chair,

PRESENTED TO THE

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BY

BENJAMIN R. WINTHROP, ESQ.,

OF NEW YORK.

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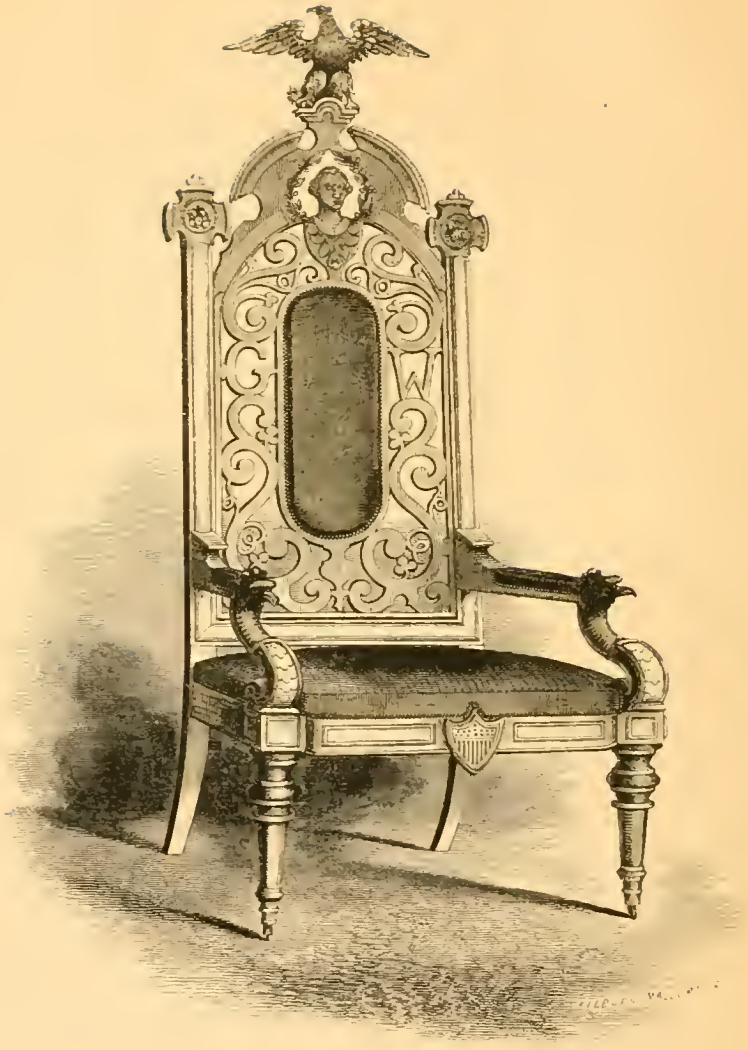
DESCRIPTION OF THE CHAIR.

The material of the Chair is oak, elaborately and beautifully wrought. It is five feet nine inches in height, and twenty-nine inches in width in front. Above the scroll-work with which the back of the chair is ornamented, and in which are to be seen the initials "G. W.," is the bust of Washington, surrounded by a wreath of laurel. Upon medallions on either side are the arms of the State and City of New York, carved in relief. The back is surmounted by the American eagle, and the supports to the arms of the chair terminate in eagles' heads. The front of the chair is also adorned with an escutcheon, displaying the Arms of the United States. A plate attached to the Chair bears an appropriate inscription.



THE

WASHINGTON CHAIR.

[From the "Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society."]

At the Monthly Meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Nov. 13, 1856, the President communicated the following letter: —

New York, October 14, 1856.

My dear Sir, — I have this day forwarded to your address a chair intended as a gift to the Massachusetts Historical Society. The inscription which it bears will inform you that it has been constructed of timber taken from the house in which Washington dwelt at the period of his inauguration as first President of the United States.

You will excuse me for adding a few words to this brief legend. The house in question was a spacious family mansion, erected by Walter Franklin somewhere about the year 1750. It stood at the junction of Pearl and Cherry Streets, facing the open triangular space called by a customary New-York license Franklin *Square*.

Names of universal philanthropy are always fitly applied to objects of public utility. Doubly appropriate is this association of Franklin's memory with a spot of ground over which fall the shadows of an edifice of gigantic proportions, of which the world can show no equal, dedicated to typographical art.

At the time of the erection of the Franklin mansion, and for a generation or two afterwards, this portion of our city, now devoted to the busy pursuits of the merchant and the artisan, was principally occupied by the residences of wealthy and fashionable citizens. The situation was unsurpassed for beauty in that day. On commanding ground, with an open square in front, and the view of the East River and the distant hills of Nassau, unobstructed by the walls of brick and the forests of masts which now obscure the intervening space, it had all the charms of suburban scenery.

It was here that the courtesy, dignity, and grace, which marked the official and private hospitality of our first President, won the affectionate regards of all who came within its sphere.

Time and change have done their work on this hallowed spot. Where the mansion once stood now runs a broad avenue, open to the ever-rushing current of active life. Few who pass it in the eager pursuit of gain, or in the daily struggle for bread, will ever call to mind the history which lies buried beneath their feet.

There is, to many of our citizens, an interest also, in which I feel you will participate, associated with the object of this change in our city map. The new street thus opened to the heart of the southern section of the city will hereafter form a continuation of the Bowery, so long known as the spacious avenue which extended through the eastern suburbs, and terminated at Chatham Row. The origin of the name given to this avenue is not so well known as it deserves to be.

Governor Stuyvesant, whose many virtues and indomitable spirit so well illustrated the character of the old Dutch dynasty, held an estate of large dimensions, beautifully located on the shores of the East River, a few miles beyond the boundaries of the city of his day. In his fondness for this his favorite retreat, where he enjoyed relaxation from the cares of public life, he gave it the name of his "Bouerie." This name it bore during his lifetime, and for many years after his death.

The country road which led from the Stuyvesant Mansion into the city came thus to be known as the "Bouerie Lane." Finally, in the progress of time, as the growing city disturbed the deep solitudes of the country, and the insatiate demands of commerce usurped the Stuyvesant domain, out of this quiet lane grew the well-known Bowery of our day, which now finds its termination at the spot where Washington, in civic glory, consummated a renown that is to live through all time.

Passing accidentally the premises to which I have thus alluded, while they were in process of demolition, it was my good fortune to rescue the material which forms the relic I now place in your charge.

If the Massachusetts Historical Society will consent to accord to this chair a place in their library, I shall regard their acquiescence as a favor to be gratefully remembered.

I am, my dear sir, ever faithfully

Your friend and cousin,

B. R. WINTHROP.

Hon. ROBERT C. WINTHROP, Boston, Mass.

Voted, That the thanks of the Society be presented to Mr. Winthrop for this interesting and acceptable donation, and that the Corresponding Secretary stand charged with the acknowledgment thereof.

Attest:

JOSEPH WILLARD,

Recording Secretary of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

LETTER

FROM

THE CORRESPONDING SECRETARY.

Boston, Nov. 17, 1856.

To B. R. Winthrop, Esq.

Dear Sir, — It has been made my agreeable duty to acknowledge the receipt of your interesting letter addressed to the Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, President of the Massachusetts Historical Society, accompanying the gift of a chair "constructed of timber taken from the house in which Washington dwelt at the period of his inauguration as first President of the United States."

The letter was read to the Society at a stated meeting held at their rooms in Boston, on Thursday, the 13th of November instant; the chair, at the time, being exhibited to the members, and attracting their attention by its beauty, and their interest as a memento of the man of whom it has been said by one of the foremost of American statesmen, that, "if our American institutions had done nothing else but furnish to the world the character of Washington, that alone would have entitled them to the respect of mankind."

After the reading of your letter, the following vote was unanimously passed: "That the thanks of the Society be given to Mr. Winthrop for his interesting and acceptable gift."

As the honored organ of our Society to communicate to you the above vote, I beg leave to add, that you could not have selected, as the favored recipient of your precious gift, any body of men among whom would be found a profounder veneration (than the Massachusetts Historical Society feels) for the memory of him who has given his name to a period, and his example to a world.

I have the honor to be, dear sir,

Very respectfully your obedient servant.

WM. P. LUNT,

Corresponding Secretary Mass. Historical Society.

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